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Furman University

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Furman reports

Homecoming 2002 crowds bask in exceptional weather, good times

Because the fall season began with a succession of heavy downpours and generally wet, dreary days, Greenville was due for some nice weather by the middle of October.

And there wasn't a better time to serve it up than Homecoming Weekend, October 18-20, as Furman celebrated reunions for classes ending with the numbers 2 and 7. As always, Saturday (the 19th) was the centerpiece for the festivities, and a near capacity crowd was on hand for the traditional Lunch on the Lawn at Cherrydale.

Folks seemed undeterred that the football game didn't start until 3:30, or an hour and a half later than usual (to accommodate television). Instead, they hung out in the balmy, 68-degree weather, toured the Alumni House, engaged in animated chatter and basically had a grand time. Their good cheer carried over to Paladin Stadium, where Furman took control early in the game against arch-rival The Citadel and rolled to a 37-10 victory.

Afterward, alumni headed to downtown Greenville for reunion dinners and the annual block party that has been a popular recent addition to Homecoming. Not to be outdone, the students — yes, Homecoming is for students, too — enjoyed their own dance at the Palmetto Expo Center, conveniently located off of Highway 291 just behind Krispy Kreme, a longtime, late-night Furman hangout.

The weekend clearly inspired good times and good memories among those who attended. As Ed Bridges of the Class of '67 commented, "It was a remarkable weekend. The sense of a shared bond came back immediately, and the warmth of our time together was as happy as anything I've experienced in a long time."

Homecoming also always offers Furman a chance to give special recognition to some of its own, and this year was no exception.

Lucius H. Weeks '54 of Pompano Beach, Fla., a leader in the banking industry in both South Carolina and Florida, received the Distinguished Alumni Award for his career success and civic contributions. Weeks was for years associated with South Carolina National Bank in Greenwood before moving to Florida, where he became president and chief executive officer of Landmark First National Bank in Fort Lauderdale. He retired from Landmark in 1985.

Aside from his work in the banking industry, Weeks is well known for his contributions to civic life, as he has spearheaded community and charitable programs wherever he has lived. At Furman, he is a lifetime member of the Advisory Council and is the founder of the Order of the Paladin, which encourages individuals to become major scholarship donors to the Paladin Club. With George Short, he also established the Selvy-Floyd Basketball Scholarship. In September, he was inducted into the Furman Athletic Hall of Fame.

The Outstanding Young Alumni Award was presented to J. Todd White '88, director of the South Carolina Teacher Advancement Program and a former state and national award-winning principal in the Greenville County School District. Supported by the state Department of Education and the Milken Family Foundation, the program which he heads is designed to improve teacher quality and increase student achievement in South Carolina.

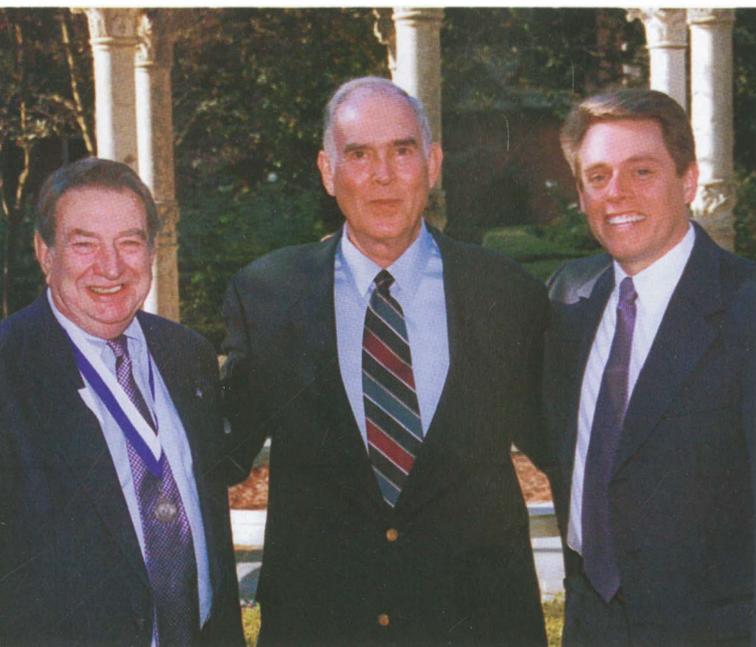
While principal at Mitchell Road Elementary School, White was named South Carolina Principal of the Year and was a winner of the Milken Foundation's National Outstanding Educator award. Furman cited his "enthusiasm as an educator, his love for children and his unwavering efforts to improve the schools of the state" in presenting his award.

John Laney Plyler, Jr. '56 of Davidson, N.C., son of the longest serving Furman president (John L. Plyler, 1939-1964), received the Alumni Service Award for his loyalty to Furman, his knowledge of university history and his gifts of time, talent and resources.

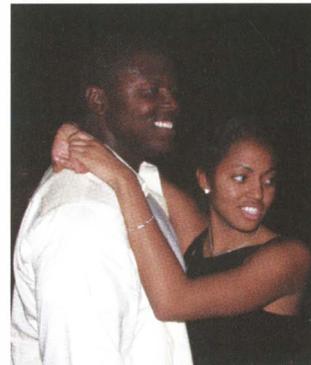
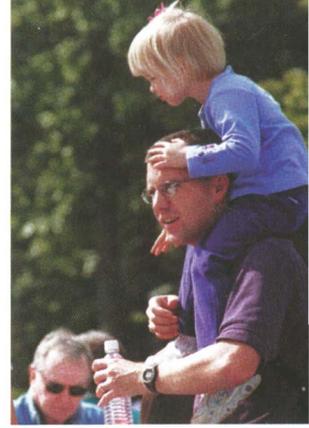
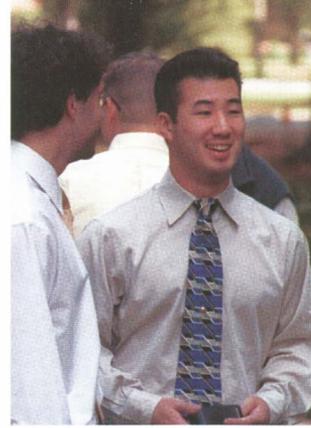
Plyler, who enjoyed a long and distinguished career in health and hospital administration before retiring in 1996 as senior vice president of SunHealth, Inc., has been a class agent and a member of the Advisory Council and the Alumni Association Board of Directors. A key contributor to the planning committee for the university's 175th anniversary activities, he has established scholarships named for his mother, Beatrice D. Plyler, and for his late son, James Williams Plyler II.

In addition, the university introduced a new award this year. The Wayne and Rubye Reid Award recognizes alumni who have provided significant career assistance to Furman students. It is named for a 1968 Furman alumnus and his wife, both of whom have touched the lives of countless alumni by assisting them in establishing and developing their careers.

The late William R. Axmann '59 was named the first recipient of the Reid Award. Axmann, who died in May, was an enthusiastic university supporter who each year recruited Furman students on behalf of his employer, Milliken and Company. He also participated in Furman's annual Career Fair and was active in the university's "mock interview" program to help students prepare for the real world. His wife, Martha, accepted the award.



Recipients of the major alumni awards were, from left, Lucius Weeks '54, Distinguished Alumni Award; John L. Plyler, Jr. '56, Alumni Service Award; and J. Todd White '88, Outstanding Young Alumni Award.



Homecoming collage: Folks who came for Friday night's Carnival on the Mall enjoyed its variety of offerings. Students didn't spend all their time playing, though, as the floats (except for one that collapsed) were completed and on display as Saturday dawned. The traditional Lunch on the Lawn at Cherrydale attracted a large gathering, some of whom stopped off to watch the rugby teams in action on the nearby football practice fields. After the football game, most alumni gathered at the Hyatt Regency downtown, while students went to the Palmetto Expo Center for their Homecoming dance. (Photos by Charlie Register and Sarah Brown '03)